

•

THE FAITH OF A PROTESTANT

•



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

**NEW YORK • BOSTON • CHICAGO
DALLAS • ATLANTA • SAN FRANCISCO**

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

**LONDON • BOMBAY • CALCUTTA
MADRAS • MELBOURNE**

**THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
OF CANADA, LIMITED
TORONTO**

W. Burnet Easton, Jr.

THE FAITH
OF A
PROTESTANT

NEW YORK
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1946

Copyright, 1946, by
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

All rights reserved—no part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in magazine or newspaper.

First Printing

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.

DEDICATED
TO
THE FELLOWSHIP OF
Christus Victor

PREFACE

It is the intention of this book to present some of the major beliefs of the Christian Faith in simple, non-technical language which lay men and women who are untrained in philosophical and theological terminology can understand. Protestantism is essentially a lay movement; and without any intention of minimizing the importance of a well-trained clergy, the strength of Protestantism is in its rank and file membership. Protestantism is strongest when the average lay member is Christianly informed, understands his beliefs, and knows the reasons for them. Unfortunately, today, there are a great many Protestants, particularly among the younger generations, who have only the vaguest idea of what they believe, or even what they are supposed to believe. They do not seem to have any idea why they are Protestants except that they were born that way.

This unfortunate situation has been brought home to me especially by the college students with whom I work. The average Protestant Christian student is a fine attractive person, but his "religious illiteracy" has been a byword among student workers for at least fifteen years. I suspect, and my contacts with the regular churches tends to confirm my suspicion, that the college student generally reflects the religious illiteracy of his parents.

For a generation or more, we have said that it did not matter very much what a man believed as long as he lived ethically, and too many of our churches have been little more than ethical culture societies. Ethical living is impor-

tant, but beliefs, in the last analysis, determine action. This vagueness in the area of belief is perhaps possible (but never advisable) in days of relative ease. In times of strain and tension, it is acutely dangerous. We are now living in such a time, and we have ample evidence of the terrible results which wrong beliefs, firmly held, can have. We also have world-wide evidence that if a man does not know what to believe he will manufacture his own false beliefs. In other words, we live in a day when this vagueness of belief is intolerable. Gradually, however, we are becoming aware of the intolerableness of this situation, and more and more people are seeking for definite answers. The number of men and women, especially students, but also older people and even ministers, who have asked me: "What do I believe as a Christian?," "Why am I a Protestant?," "Where can I find a book on Protestant belief?," has impelled me to write this book.

It is my conviction that Protestant Christianity is the purest form of Christianity; and that its understanding of the nature of man, his destiny, and the Church, provides the only solutions to the problems of human life, both social and individual. The Protestant Reformation was a sincere, necessary, and on the whole successful attempt to recapture the essential meaning of the Christian Faith. We frequently think of the Protestant Reformation as primarily a protest against the abuses of the Roman Church. To a certain degree this is true, as the name Protestant implies. But to leave the matter there is to give a negative interpretation of the significance of the Reformation and of Protestant Christianity. We should also remember that the word Protestant comes from the Latin, *pro*, "before" plus *testari*, "to be a witness," and the major role of Protestantism is to witness to the Christian truth. It is in that sense that this book is written.

Because I am writing primarily for lay people, young and old—people who do not have time or training to read the weightier religious books—I have tried to condense some of the major Christian beliefs, and the reasons for them into rather brief, simple form. The result, as I am well aware, is that I have oversimplified some of the discussion. Trained theologians and philosophers will doubtless find a number of points which they may feel do not take into consideration all the niceties of a profound scholarly argument. I make no apology for this simplification, although I hope that even the theologians will recognize a true witness to the Christian Faith.

No claim is made that there is anything original in this book. Readers will find no new theory of Christianity presented. I have attempted nothing more than a simple restatement of the historic Christian doctrines in the hope that ordinary people will find them compelling. I am, of course, indebted to innumerable people—former teachers, and friends, both students and adults, and various writers. I have, however, tried to keep references to scholarly works which most lay people never read to a minimum. I am particularly indebted to my friends, Prof. James Cleland formerly of Amherst College now of Duke University, Dr. Vernon Helming of Massachusetts State College, Dr. Douglas Horton of the General Council of Congregational-Christian Churches, and the Rev. Jesse Trotter of Grace Episcopal Church, Amherst, for reading my manuscript and for many valuable suggestions. They, however, are not responsible for what I have said. I also wish to thank Miss Elizabeth Allen of Massachusetts State College for help in typing. The help, both direct and indirect, of my wife has been greater than any acknowledgement can express.

W. B. E., Jr.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
I OUR TIME	i
II MAN	8
III FAITH IN GOD	16
IV THE NATURE OF GOD—THE TRINITY	24
V JESUS, CHRIST, AND JESUS CHRIST	33
VI THE RESURRECTION	40
VII THE CHURCH	48
VIII THE KINGDOM IS COMING AND THE KINGDOM IS WITHIN YOU	58
IX THE BASIS OF SOCIAL ACTION	69

CHAPTER 1

OUR TIME

It is clear, as all our more reflective thinkers are aware, that our time is an exceedingly critical one. By *our time* I mean more than the few years of the present war, World War II. As the Roman numeral II indicates, this war is merely one illustration of the magnitude of the crisis of our time. In the writer's lifetime, and he is still relatively a young man, there have been two world wars, the first wars in history that have engulfed truly the whole world, and a worldwide economic depression. Indeed, as many have pointed out, the depression was overcome only by the preparation for and participation in World War II. Nor is there at the present writing any real assurance that there will not be a World War III in another twenty-five or thirty years. The prospects that the much publicized "Four Freedoms" will be made effective in the next period of peace are not encouraging. One can hope for the best, and we must work for the best; but realistically the best looks as though it would be none too good. Our time is a critical one, and the crisis is by no means over.

In fact, our lot seems to be to live in one of those times when one civilization dies and another comes to birth. To put it in other terms, civilization appears to be turning a corner. Arnold J. Toynbee in his *Study of History* likens civilization to a train running along a track. The train is held on the track by a tiny flange on the wheel. When the train

turns a curve, the pressure of the flange on the rail is terrific. In one sense, you and I are being ground between the flange and the rail as our civilization turns a corner.

There are multitudes of people who cannot stand the pressure. In the wider area it is seen in the mad attempts of peoples to escape or lose themselves in "religions" of nationalism, socialism, utopianism, and mysticism. In the personal area it is seen in the rise in the number of broken homes and child delinquency, of suicides and mental breakdowns. It is significant that one of the most profitable professions today, where the "demand" far exceeds the "supply," is psychiatry. Then there are an even vaster multitude of people who are not truly neurotic but who are bewildered and cynical, who carry on without much hope.

It is true that our young men answered the call of country and that they have fought with courage and self-sacrifice. But all the reports indicate that they fought without much conviction or hope. Their chief desire seemed to be to get it over and get home. Recently the papers carried a report of a sign which the men in the South Pacific had erected, to the effect: "1946 Tokio—1948 The Breadlines." Certainly in the tiny section of the Armed Forces with which the writer has had intimate contact the men were conscientiously doing a job from which they could not escape, but were doing it without enthusiasm.

Yes, there is sacrifice and heroism among our young men today, and we should be grateful for this evidence of the majesty of the human spirit, but it should not blind us to the deeper malady of our time. War with the pressure of mass appeal, discipline, and "glory" makes physical heroism relatively easy. A man thrust into a difficult physical situation may and usually does act heroically, but his heroism does

not mean that when the situation has passed he is any less confused or has any more sense of his place and destiny in life. Men and women today, in the "war effort" or out, are confused and, consciously or unconsciously, despairing.

I do not intend to labor this point, partly because it is obvious and partly because any number of books are being written that analyze this situation better than I can. Any serious attempt to understand our present situation, however, or to understand Man or God or the Christian Faith, must be made against the background of the confusion and crisis of our time. I intend to speak of it briefly from the Christian point of view.

This book is a book about the Christian Faith. From the Christian perspective the crisis of our time, which I have outlined briefly above, is basically the result of the secularism of our time—a turning away from God, an attempt to live life, in whole or in part, without God. According to the Christian Faith this is impossible, for Christianity asserts that the primary datum of all life and all understanding is the fact of God, a God who creates, who acts, and who controls the universe and everything and everyone in it. I am well aware that for many people this is a very big, even an impossible assumption, and that it needs explanation. Later (Chapter III) I shall try to explain and justify it. For the moment, however, I ask the reader to wait and to accept this assumption without argument.

Now if we accept the existence of such a God, then there is no aspect of our life that does not have religious significance. This is a fact which we have forgotten. In our passion for labels and classifications we have said that certain aspects of life are secular and have no significance religiously whereas certain other aspects are "religious" or "spiritual."

We say that worshiping in Church is religious but that going to a dance is secular. All of us have heard preachers and moralists make speeches ending with "and now I want to speak of the religious (or spiritual) side of life." The Roman Catholic Church particularly encourages its devotees to emphasize certain particular acts as religious, and Protestants have increasingly tended to make the same error. But since God is the God of the whole of life, there is no aspect of life that does not have significance for Him—therefore, religious significance. It is impossible for a person to go either to a church or to a dance without having an attitude, conscious or unconscious, toward God. In either case we may try to act as children of God or we may act to glorify ourselves and to defy Him. In all that we do we express an attitude which is religious. It may be bad religion, but it is still religious. To say that only certain acts are religious is to say that God is only in control of, or interested in, certain (today very limited) areas of life. This limitation, as Paul Tillich has pointed out, is really to make God not God but a demon, for a demon by definition is supposed to be a deity or spirit who has control over a specified part of life. Classical Protestantism in its doctrine of vocations recognized that all areas of life are under God and rightly claimed that a man could live as religiously and as much for the glory of God in a secular vocation as he could in the professional ministry or priesthood. But this great insight has been largely lost out of modern Protestantism.

We have increasingly tended to divide life into religious and non-religious aspects. Some of this has been done by well-meaning would-be defenders of the faith who, faced with the attacks of materialistic and rationalistic natural science, have tried to preserve some area of life for religion. Perhaps for a time this attempt provided a useful rearguard

action, but the result has been tragic. The area of religious significance for most people has been steadily reduced. Indeed, for many it has been reduced to zero. Their whole lives are lived without reference to God. For others, religion has become a topic to argue about in leisure time, and, "if you felt that way," to practice in certain specific acts, as in going to church and in private meditation, the former of which has too frequently become a form of insurance for community respectability; while the latter, for the relatively few who practice it, is too often a form of auto-suggestion and personality culture rather than of Christian prayer.

Thus in the world where most of us live our lives, earn our daily bread, and make our decisions, religion has been left out even by the religious. God is not expected to operate. Recently a student of mine, a fine Christian girl, brought up in a Christian home and loyal to the Church, came to me troubled about what to do after graduation. We talked over various possibilities in the light of her training and aptitudes. Finally I suggested that she pray about it and seek guidance from God. She was dumbfounded at the suggestion. The idea that God really might have a plan for her which she could discover through prayer had never entered her thinking. God for her was a respectable intellectual proposition, indeed a necessary proposition to explain the universe, but still merely a proposition. Jesus was an ethical teacher who commanded her loyalty. Christianity and the Church were guardians of morality which a right-minded person would support. Religion should be given a due portion of her time and energy, and it should spill over into supposed non-religious areas such as being honest in secular activities. But except for this morality, which is indistinguishable from the morality of the best non-religious moralists, religion was confined to certain specified segments of life. In the rest it

simply did not operate. I suspect that the only difference between this girl and millions of other Christians in our churches is that she is more loyal in her "duties" than many. More typical is the young man, a church member, who said to me: "I guess there must be a God, but my religion is trying to practice the Golden Rule."

Two facts stand out today. One is that for most of our church members religion has been reduced in meaning to the performance of certain acts in limited areas of life—and these not the area of major decisions. Except for religion's having a slightly restraining influence on conduct, most people live in a completely secular world. They get and beget according to their own best judgment of what will profit them most. Their standards of judgment are taken, not from a God toward whom they feel responsible, but from other people as secular as themselves. Christian Faith insofar as it affects them at all consists of a few duties, a few good works and a vague idealism, virtually identical with the duties, works, and idealism of their secular neighbors.

The second fact is the confusion, cynicism, and despair, the symptoms of the crisis of our time of which I have spoken earlier. This situation is intolerable. People want to believe in something; indeed, they must and will find something to believe simply because they cannot stand living in a spiritual vacuum. So they are searching. But as a result of their search many are turning to false gods. That there is a direct connection between the secularism of our time and the crisis of our time is plain as a pikestaff once the hypothesis of God is granted. If there be such a God, the secularism of our time is a form of apostasy; and the crisis of our time, evidenced by war and unrest in the social life, and cynicism and despair in the personal life, is evidence of the judgment of a God who will not let apostasy go unrebuked. It is a matter of first im-

portance that this awe-inspiring principle be understood. In order to make it clear, I should like to close this chapter by summarizing what I have said in three brief propositions:

Life becomes secular when men, consciously or unconsciously, forget or neglect the fact of God as the Lord of all life, and assume, consciously or unconsciously, that men are sufficient unto themselves, and are the final arbiters of their destiny.

Life becomes religious when men, consciously or unconsciously, incorporate, not only into their intellectual thinking, but also into their working pattern of life, the realization of a power or powers infinitely more significant than themselves. For Christian Faith this power is the God revealed in the Old and New Testaments but especially in Jesus Christ, as the Eternal Righteous Judge, the Eternal Loving Parent and the Eternal Guarantor of the Victory of the Good.

Our time is a time of apostasy, for by and large, consciously or unconsciously, we assume that men are sufficient unto themselves and that they are the final arbiters of their destiny. Since this is an impossible situation, our time is a time of confusion and crisis which is the judgment of God.

CHAPTER II

MAN

The place to begin our thinking is with the nature of God, but for my purpose here it seems better to postpone that discussion until the next chapter and turn to a consideration of Man. One reason for this arrangement is that belief in God is, as we shall see, an act of faith; but we are all men and know that we exist as such. Furthermore all that we know we know only as men. Unamuno, the great Spanish philosopher, once observed that a crab may resolve equations of the second degree inwardly but that his doing so makes no difference to human existence. Perhaps the crab has a much clearer idea of God than I have: perhaps my dog has a metaphysical system which is better and truer than mine; but he cannot communicate it to me, and it has no relation to my life. I, as a man, am concerned only with what happens to me as a man, and I can only know what I can know as it can be known by men.

For this reason, all our conceptions, including our conception of God, are anthropomorphic. Some of the critics of religion accuse men of having created God in their own image. This is a true criticism but a very superficial one. If there be a God at all, the only possible way in which He could reveal Himself to men would be in terms which they could understand as men, and it is inevitable that men, in trying to make clear this revelation to themselves and to other men, should use human terms.

Thus we begin with man because that is where we must begin. But immediately we are struck by the fact that although all of us know we are men, there are many answers to the question: "What is man?" According to whom we put the question, we get different answers, such as: "A physico-chemico mechanism or organism," "A spiritual being," "A sociological unit," "An animal that makes tools," "A reasoning animal," and so on. All of these definitions have some truth in them. However, as this is not a book on the philosophy of man, I shall not discuss their pros and cons. I shall merely try to state the Christian idea of man.

The Christian doctrine of man is rooted in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. This is a "philosophical myth." It is not literally true that there ever was a man Adam and a woman Eve who lived in a particular Garden of Eden somewhere in Mesopotamia and begat the human race. It is true, however, that somewhere in the course of evolution between the "first amoeba" and ourselves there emerged man; and it is legitimate, indeed necessary, if we are to think about the beginnings of man at all, that we use the device of a first man and a first woman. The myth of Adam and Eve is further true in that it expresses profound insight into the nature of man.

First of all, the story of Adam and Eve asserts that man is made "in the image of God." This does not mean that God has arms, legs, hair, and so forth; it means that man, the creature, shares some of the creative capacity of the Creator, i.e., man too can create; and that just as God is love, man has the capacity to love. Originally, in the Garden, man was innocent. He did not know good from evil. This state is analogous to the prehuman state of animal existence, for animals are innocent. We sometimes speak of animals as good or bad, but we mean that they are good or bad from

a human point of view. This innocence was without character, for man cannot develop character except as he learns to choose the better from the less good. Adam eats of the tree of knowledge and learns to distinguish between good and evil. The stage of innocence is ended but man now has the possibility of developing character and using his creative ability. It is only after Adam has been put out of Eden that he begets children or is creative. In this sense, the Fall is a Fall up rather than down. Thus man becomes man when the characterless animal learns to make judgments on the basis of good and evil. I know of no weighty book on anthropology that explains the nature of man as simply, as briefly, or as profoundly as the Creation story of Genesis.

But there is more to the Creation story than this. It is exceedingly important for the Christian understanding of man that the temptation of Adam and Eve by the serpent should be based on an appeal to pride and egoism; it is a temptation for man to deify himself. “. . . then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3:5). In other words, Christianity says that man is a creature (an animal) who is created in the image of God (man is also a creator), but that his creative ability makes him proud of himself and makes him try to glorify—deify himself to such a degree that he forgets that he is also the creature of God. Man tends to set himself up as the final arbiter of his own destiny; he tries to be God. But this estimate of man's powers is impossible; the creature can never be what his Creator is and man can never be God. Worse still, from the Christian (or any other profoundly religious) point of view this human arrogance is no less than blasphemy!

This is what Christianity means by sin. Sin for Christian Faith is something far more profound than the moralities: “Don't drink, smoke, swear, steal, or commit adultery.”

These are sins only because they are expressions of the more basic sin of self-will and pride. And this is *original sin*, not because two immemorably antique people committed a crime and passed it on to all subsequent generations, but because Adam and Eve are the symbols of all people. We are all Adams and Eves. The baby in the womb is innocent but characterless. Sometime after birth, in order to achieve character it must assert itself, but this self-assertion is essentially selfish. This does not mean that babies have no potentialities for love but all babies begin development by being self-centered, egotistical little tyrants who want what they want when they want it.¹ The fact that the baby's parents may be saints does not mean that the baby will be any less a self-centered tyrant. As Plato observed long ago, there is no way to guarantee that virtue will be passed on from father to son.² This self-assertive capacity of man is an essential part of our nature: it is a "given," and it is the source and root of all our creative capacities. But it is also the source of our self-deification and our lust for power and pleasure. It is an "original" part of us.

Thus Christianity understands that man is both a creator "made in the image of God" with infinite possibilities for becoming a child of God, and at the same time, a self-assertive creature who creates primarily to satisfy his own

¹ Dr. Fritz Kunkel in his excellent book *In Search of Maturity* (Charles Scribner's Sons) states that children are not born as egocentric individualists, but that "the truth is the opposite" (p. 83). An adequate consideration of this question would involve an intricate discussion of much greater length than is possible here. I can only say that it seems to me that for the sake of his major point, which is a good one, Dr. Kunkel has oversimplified the matter here. Moreover in his whole book Dr. Kunkel makes clear that we must all go through egocentricity and that only a religion that understands the profundity of sin going "back to Adam's fall" can solve this problem. See especially pp. 200 f.

² It is worth observing that this truth knocks into a cocked hat modern ideas of spiritual and ethical progress.

selfish desires. Man is a paradoxical creature who creates, but the more successful he becomes, the more he glories *in* himself and seeks power and glory *for* himself, denying his Creator and thus dooming himself. The idea that man is essentially good and that only ignorance prevents him from being truly divine, and the idea that man is absolutely corrupt are both errors. Man is both essentially good and essentially self-corrupting at the same time. He is capable of nobly creative and unselfish acts, but into every one of these acts comes a selfish, self-corrupting factor. One simple illustration: I take the time and effort to write this book because I honestly want more people to understand the Christian Faith and am therefore writing for the glory of God. At the same time, I cannot help feeling that it will be very nice to see my name in print and have people congratulate me. I am therefore also writing for my own glory. It is impossible for me to say where one begins and the other ends; but I greatly suspect that even though I fail to present the true Christian Faith I shall be satisfied if enough people congratulate me, and be quite happily confirmed in my error with a tendency to be more self-confident and self-complacent than ever before.

This is what Christianity means when it says that man is an inevitable sinner. Man by himself cannot escape this dilemma, for it springs from the essential nature which makes him a man. The very attributes that make him man and raise him above the animals are the attributes that lead him to glorify himself and deny God, and the more success he has, the more he corrupts himself. In human terms this situation is insoluble, but Christianity claims that by virtue of the work of Jesus Christ it can be solved in terms of submission to a God who understands and who forgives. This does not mean that we ever become perfect or are without sin; rather

it means that when we confess our sin and try to do the will of God as best we can, we are forgiven, and saved or justified³ by the grace of God. St. Paul expressed this perfectly in his letter to the Romans: "Miserable wretch that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? God will! Thanks be to him through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thus, left to myself I serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin" (Rom. 7:24, 25. Moffatt).⁴

The question then remains: how does one achieve this grace of God by virtue of which alone one may be forgiven and do the will of God? In the answer to this question lies one of the major differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Practically speaking the Roman position is that God's grace is the exclusive prerogative of the Roman hierarchy, who dispense this grace through their sacraments to those who are obedient. All others are hopelessly damned.⁵ From the Protestant point of view this exclusiveness is not only an error; it is heresy and blasphemy, partly because it limits the power of God in Christ, and partly because it creates religious self-righteousness, which is the most diabolical of all forms of self-righteousness.

Protestantism, taking its stand on what it believes is implicit in the Gospels and made explicit by St. Paul (notably in his letters to the Galatians and to the Romans), claims that man is "justified by faith." As St. Paul makes clear in these

³ The terms "salvation" and "justification" are repugnant to many moderns, and a layman friend of mine asked me recently to put these terms in language of the modern vernacular. I hazarded this definition which he found satisfactory: "To be O.K. before God."

⁴ Restoring the last half of verse 25 which the Moffatt Translation (Harper Brothers) places before verse 24 to its proper position as in the King James and American Revised Versions. Even after we are saved we are still subject to sin.

⁵ This is perhaps a slight overstatement. Technically the Roman Church provides some hope for those who do not know about it; but those who do (and that includes all of us who are Protestant) are beyond the pale.

Epistles,⁶ man is not justified or saved by his own wisdom nor by any legalism but by his own act of faith. By virtue of the work of Jesus Christ, I, by my faith, am justified and saved before God. In so far as I truly repent my sins and sincerely try to do the will of God as I understand it in Jesus Christ, I am forgiven and receive the grace of God. Protestantism insists that this transaction is a personal matter, a personal encounter between God and each man. No institution, no priest, no third person can do this for me, neither grant nor withhold the grace of God. Others may and can advise and help tremendously, they can point out the necessity for the encounter and what is involved; but in the last analysis I am justified by my own act of faith solely. I submit my life to God as my own act of free will in faith, and in faith now I am forgiven and receive God's grace.⁷

To summarize: according to the Christian Faith man is both a creature and a creator at the same time. He has infinite possibilities for good, but essentially and inexorably involved in these infinite possibilities for good are equally infinite possibilities for self-corruption. This dual nature creates a dilemma for man, for in spite of all his desires and capacities to be a creator he is always a creature. No human device can resolve this dilemma, and all human attempts to solve it only aggravate the problem. For the more successful man appears to be, the more he tries to deify himself and deny his Creator. The only solution is for man to repent his arrogance and try to submit his creative capacities to his

⁶ For the untrained reader, the Galatians letter is the easier to grasp. The doctrine of justification by faith is there set out briefly and simply although hastily. It was written in the heat of controversy. In Romans Paul writes the same general argument much more deliberately and systematically. It is more profoundly stated but more difficult to grasp.

⁷ The implications of this position for the Protestant doctrine of the Church will be made clear in Chapter VII on the Church.

Creator—to the will of God. No man can do this perfectly, but, because of Jesus Christ, we in faith know that God is a God of forgiveness. We know that when we sincerely try to do the will of God we are judged not on our accomplishments but on our intentions. This act of faith must be made by each person for himself; no other person can do it for him. Once this is done we do not become perfect, we do not cease to sin, but we do receive the grace of God in forgiveness and in guidance. We begin to grow in the knowledge and the strength which comes with this supreme assurance.

Thus Christian faith recognizes the essentially tragic nature of man, and thus it offers its solution, which is the only solution. The failure to accept the Christian understanding of man and its solution leads in social terms to materialism, secularism, and crisis, in personal terms to cynicism, crassness, fear, and despair. Both the Christian understanding of man's nature and its solution of his dilemma are based upon the assumption of the God revealed in the Bible, most especially as He is revealed by Jesus Christ. To the basis for this assumption we now turn.

.

CHAPTER III

FAITH IN GOD

Christianity, like all great religions, is based upon a belief in a supernatural power, or deity. It declares that this deity has revealed Himself and His will for men in various ways (to be described in the next chapter) but most uniquely and notably in Jesus Christ. The solution, therefore, to man's problem is a return to a real faith in this God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately this is far easier said than done. In fact it will never be done completely.

Every now and then some good pious soul remarks, "If only everyone would be Christian, it would solve all our problems." This naïve faith is both true and illusory. It is true that if everyone would be really Christian, our problems would be solved, but this is illusory because there never will be, in this world, such a time. For one thing, there will always be some people to whom the Christian Faith is absurd and to whom the Christian ethic of love will appear weak, sentimental, and unrealistic. For another, and this difficulty is far more important, the demands of the Christian Faith are so high and so rigorous that even those of us who are Christian are never Christian enough. We have already noted man's capacity for corrupting himself, and to this inherent weakness should be added another truth, ignored by most of our educators: the fact that a man knows or can be taught what is the right thing to do is no guarantee that he will do it. Every one of us can look back over the past twenty-four

hours and recall a number of cases where we knew perfectly well what we should have done but did not do it, or knew what we should not have done and did it. There will never come a time when there will be a completely Christian society; nor will there ever be an individual who will live "according to the law of Christ" more than fragmentarily.

The picture, however, is not as pessimistic as this at first appears. The worst aspects of our secularism and the resulting confusion *can* be eliminated if we make a genuine attempt to return to the Christian Faith. Strangely enough, as untold numbers of Christians in all ages have testified, the attempt itself brings with it, by the grace of God, inner peace, strength, and creativity. And the fact that knowledge does not automatically produce right living does not minimize the importance of knowledge. Unless there is knowledge of the Faith, it is impossible to have an experience of it.¹ One of the reasons for the secularism and confusion of and in our time is, as I have already indicated, that there are so many people, even in our churches, who have never been taught what the Christian Faith consists of. They do not know what they are supposed to believe. Consequently this book will have fulfilled its function if it is a clear witness to some of the major tenets of the Christian Faith. The first of these is the assumption of the existence of a God Who creates, and Who is good, just, and forgiving, and Who has the power to act and does act.

In the first chapter, I stated that this assumption is the major assumption of Christian Faith and asked readers to accept it for the moment. Now this position needs some explanation, for I am quite aware that this seems an irrational assumption to many people and that their initial prob-

¹ It is as the custodian of this knowledge that the Church has one of its greatest functions.

lem is inability to believe in a God Who acts and is concerned with them personally. This is a problem for a large number of people inside our churches as well as outside. To take the Christian idea of God for granted, is, for these people, to jump lightly and unjustifiably over the most important question of religious faith, a question upon the answer of which all the rest depends.

But crucial as this point is, I shall not rehearse again the various philosophical arguments for the existence of God. There are three reasons for this. One is that there are innumerable books in print which discuss this question from every conceivable angle with far more philosophical competence than I possess.

A second and more important reason is that in the last analysis all of the so-called philosophical arguments for the existence of God—cosmological, teleological, ontological, moral, and so forth—are only arguments and not absolute proofs. This does not mean that they have no value for the inquiring mind in its search for God: they can give real support. But to call them *proofs* for the existence of God, particularly of a God in the Christian sense, is an overstatement of the case. The most that can be said for any of the philosophical arguments, or for all of them put together, is that they point to a probability and create an intellectual interpretation of existence where the assumption of a God is not unreasonable. They do not, however, absolutely and irrefutably prove that God exists.

If a man already has a predisposition to believe in God or has had an experience of God, the philosophical arguments can strengthen his belief; and since we are in an age which emphasizes reason, they help him to feel that his belief in God has rational grounds. But the predisposition to find God, or at least a willingness to try to see some probability for His

existence is first necessary. If a man is already predisposed to deny God's existence and has already made up his mind that such a proposition is an impossible one, none of the philosophical arguments can be made absolutely convincing proofs. On rational and empirical grounds alone, the non-believer's position is on just as intellectually defensible grounds as the believer's.² He can always say with complete honesty: "I see nothing in your argument but the desire to support an hypothesis which to me is unnecessary." The ultimate proof of God is an experience of God, and an experience is not an arguable matter. I think that those of us who are Christians would do well to stop trying to argue people into a belief in God and simply testify by word and life to what God has done for us.

Then there is another area in which philosophy breaks down. It is quite possible to be intellectually convinced that there is some Super-power we call God without having any sense of loyalty to Him. There are very, very few thorough-going atheists, for a consistent atheism is a difficult and rigorous position to maintain. Most people admit belief in some kind of a God as necessary "to hold the universe together," but such a faith is a far cry from the Christian conception of a God who determines history and who loves and is anxious about you and me. To make this assertion is not to depreciate philosophy. It has its functions. It is an excellent discipline, and it is reassuring to know that some of our ablest thinkers find "a Principle of Concretion" or "a Pure Mathematician" or "a Nexus of Emergent Evolution" in the universe which they call God. Most of us, however, cannot pray to a "Principle of Concretion"; neither are we likely to feel that a "Pure Mathematician" will give much help for the particular tragedies of our mundane lives. Moreover, once a man has experienced God through Christ in his personal life, the fact

that this God may also be the "Nexus of Emergent Evolution" is nothing more than an interesting but non-essential sidelight, and has little to do with his faith.

This leads to the third reason why I am not interested in elaborating weighty arguments for the existence of God. The Christian Faith assumes the existence of God as a "given" and does not argue it. Contrary to the opinion of many people, Christianity is not properly a pursuit of the Truth about the ultimate nature of life; it is a declaration of the Truth as already revealed. It is significant that nowhere in the Bible, whether in the Old Testament or the New, is there a philosophical argument for the existence of God. There is no evidence that Jesus ever tried even remotely to prove His existence. God is "the great given" and is beyond argument. The first-century apostles and disciples did not go to the Roman Empire, with all its scepticism, and argue that men ought to believe in God; they went declaring what God had done in Jesus Christ. They set forth a proposition that men had to accept or reject; those who accepted it found a new inner peace amid outer chaos, and established a community that has endured the changes of civilization since. In view of their success it might be well if we twentieth-century Christians were to reemploy their strategy.

In the last analysis, the Christian Faith about God or about any other of its major tenets is not something that is arguable. It is a faith and it is foolish to pretend that it is anything other than a faith. It is something we, too, must either accept or reject. It can no more be proved to one who steadfastly refuses to believe it than the joy of married love and fidelity can be proved to one who has never experienced it.

This admission, however, that our Faith is a faith does not mean that it is not true or that we are lacking in rational capacities. Before the mysteries of the universe and human

destiny we mortals really *know* nothing. The ultimate questions—of why there should be a universe, or human existence, and what their meaning is—are questions that are humanly insoluble. And the human defeats, tragedies, and frustrations of life make the problem even more insoluble, if that is possible. Every hypothesis about life and its meaning is ultimately an unprovable assumption and therefore a faith. If the existence of a God cannot be proved, neither can it be disproved. Both the atheist and the theist look at the universe, and from their observations make assumptions that are equally assumptions of faith. The commonplace distinction between a religious person as a person of faith and a non-religious person as a person without faith is not really a true distinction. To have faith in nothing, if that is possible, is to have faith that the universe is meaningless. But this, too, is an assumption that cannot be proved and is therefore still a faith. The argument then comes down to the question, not of faith versus no faith, but of what *kind* of faith we live by. This choice is the crux of the matter. So far as we are human beings who live, and make decisions, and act, we are all men of faith: no man can escape this fundamental condition of all human life.

Different faiths, however, produce different results, and that perhaps is the most important fact of life. The faith that there is a God, is the faith that the universe is meaningful and that you and I can find meaning for our lives by losing them in the greater meaningfulness given by God. It results in "the peace that passeth understanding," creativity, and hope. The faith that there is no God, is a faith that in the cold mechanical operation of natural law there is no meaning, and that life is nothing more than a mad, ruthless, chaotic strife. The result, for all but morons, is selfishness, hopeless cynicism, and despair. These alternatives, which are true alter-

natives, are expressed beautifully by William Pepperell Montague in his little book *Belief Unbound*:²

The question of religion's truth or falsity is exciting and momentous because it is a question . . . whether the things we care for most are at the mercy of the things we care for least. If God is not, then the existence of all that is beautiful and in any sense good, is but the accidental and ineffective by-product of blindly swirling atoms. . . . A man may believe that this dreadful thing is true. But only the fool will say in his heart that he is glad that it is true. For to wish that there should be no God is to wish that all the things that we love and strive to realize and make permanent should be only temporary and doomed to frustration and destruction. . . . Atheism leads not to badness but only to incurable sadness and loneliness.

The Christian Faith declares that the things we care for most are not at the mercy of the things we care for least, but that, because of God, the things we love and strive to realize will be ultimately victorious no matter how many times they may be temporarily defeated in the mundane world. The good is worth doing, not because it is the decent thing to do, not just because it is more idealistic to do it, not even because it is more noble, but because there is a God who undergirds the good and undergirds those who obey His will in doing the good, bringing both the good and His children to an ultimate victory over the evil.

Such is the Christian Faith about God. It is not an arguable matter. It is an experience we have and is an experience that "ten thousand times ten thousand" down through the ages have also had. It is something that has laid hold of us. We can only testify to it and point out the vast difference this Faith makes in our lives as against all other faiths.

² Yale University Press.

This is about as far as we can go into the question of the existence of God. We can, however—and indeed must—go further in describing the nature of this God and how He reveals Himself to men. If “the chief end of man,” as the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, is “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever,” we must understand something of His nature in order that we may be intelligent and obedient children. Otherwise our Faith in God will be either an abstraction or a superstition.

.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURE OF GOD—THE TRINITY

The camel, as all can see, has a very haughty appearance. He looks as though he considered himself a grade above the human beings for whom he unfortunately must work. There is a Mohammedan story which explains this spiritual haughtiness of the camel. According to this story, there are one hundred names or descriptive attributes for God. Men know only ninety-nine of these, but the camel knows the one hundredth! The point of this story is that the complete nature of God is beyond human comprehension or description. It is a sound idea and is expressed by the writer of Isaiah 55 when he declares: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the Heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (vs. 8-9). Indeed, this concept runs through the whole Old Testament. Any man who looks upon the face of God will die; and the Hebrew people are forbidden to make "a graven image or the likeness of anything that is in the heavens above or . . . the earth beneath or . . . the waters under the earth" (Exodus 20:4) because every attempt to do so will be inaccurate,¹ and thus a blasphemy. In the Book of Exodus

¹ Perhaps this is why there is no philosophical defense of the existence of God in the Bible. Every philosophical defense requires ultimately descriptive terms and the defense of them. But God is beyond human description.

there is a crude but profound story. Moses wishes to see God's face but God hides Moses in the cleft of a rock and covers him with His hand while He passes Moses. Moses is allowed to see only God's back (Exodus 33:17-23). The meaning of this story, too, is that we never see nor can completely comprehend God but that we may be aware that we have had an experience of His presence.

This note is needed today. Because of our passion for careful definitions and rational explanations too many people want God defined precisely and presented, so to speak, in a neat comprehensible package. Although in "enlightened" circles we have given up the cruder anthropomorphic conception of God as a Great Grand-Daddy with a long white beard sitting on a throne, in actual fact we frequently have given up only the throne and the beard, but have retained the Grand-Daddy. When tragedy and world catastrophe which do not fit in with the Grand-Daddy conception descend upon us, we are at a loss to understand how God can operate in such a world. Modern liberals have said rather glibly that God is love. This is true, but we have forgotten that love can and must be disciplinary, and that it involves suffering. Furthermore there are certain aspects of life which seem to deny a God of love, as for instance the birth of mental defectives. Either we are forced to deny the power of God in such situations (which is to make Him less than God, a demon) or else to admit that a simple definition such as "God is love" is too simple.

The fact is that there is much about God and His character that is totally unknown and totally incomprehensible. Some of life's tragedy and suffering can be explained in terms of human sin, as, for instance, this war was the result of pride, self-seeking, and the refusal to practice brotherhood. Some of it can be explained in terms of natural law, as when a man

falls downstairs, or a city is destroyed by an earthquake because it was built on a geological fault. But some of life's tragedy defies rational explanation. I can see no justice or love in the fact that my children in these war years go to bed each night fed, comfortable, and in reasonable security, while other children, no more guilty than mine, go to bed, if they go at all, starved and in terror of bombs. Yet this situation must also be within the province of God, or He is not God. The first statement then which needs to be made about the nature of God is that it is a mystery beyond our comprehension; it defies all attempts at neat and simple definitions. Men are only men, and finite creatures of their Creator. With Job we must cry: "Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not" (Job 42:3).

We must begin by recognizing that we, as creatures, cannot completely define or comprehend the Creator; but we should immediately go on to say, that according to the Christian Faith, God has revealed *enough* of Himself and of His will and purpose to us, to enable us to live as His children in this world and to enter into His glory in the world to come. In other words, He has revealed enough of Himself for our salvation. And that is more than enough.

Traditionally Christianity has put this self-revelation of God to men in terms of the Trinity. Unfortunately to many moderns the idea of the Trinity, the idea of three Gods and one God at the same time, seems not only logically impossible but also downright crazy. But the difficulty arises in such minds mainly because they have not understood the meaning of the Trinity. The Trinity is not an argument for the existence of God; it is a description of the nature of God in so far as it is revealed to men.

I cannot here go into a long philosophical discussion of the problem of knowledge, but generally speaking there are three ways in which we come to know anything. First, we come to know by observation of the phenomena of life and the deductions and assumptions we make from these observations. Second, we learn from persons—parents, friends, teachers, writers, and so on. And third, we learn from insights gained in reflection and meditation, and by intuition. The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity is nothing more than a human attempt to describe the nature of God in terms of the three ways man comes to know anything.

One of the ways we learn about God (more properly speaking in Christian terms, one of the ways in which God has revealed Himself) is from observation of the natural world. The orderly processes of nature, the succession of the seasons, the movements of the stars and the atoms, the laws of growth and death—all the myriad indications of design in the universe—have always led men to see in the natural world the evidence of a Creator as the most reasonable explanation. Thus we speak of God the Creator, Almighty and Eternal or, as the Apostles' Creed puts it, "God the Father Almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth." This is what Christian Faith calls the First Person of the Trinity or the first way in which God is revealed to men. It should be noted, however, that in applying the term "Father" to the First Person, the Apostles' Creed borrows an idea that belongs somewhat to the second way that we know God and is not entirely inherent in the first without the further revelation of the second.²

God the Creator is the simplest way in which men have

² It is true that Fatherhood involves creativity but in modern times the term Fatherhood also includes love, guidance, judgment, forgiveness, etc. and these latter attributes are not included in the idea of God the Creator.

always recognized God. From time immemorial, and even today, probably more people see and think they worship God in nature than in any other way. This bent is especially evident in young people, and at innumerable young people's conferences the highlight is some outdoor worship service where they worship the God of nature. Unfortunately the God of nature is far less than the Christian idea of God.

The God of nature is a God of power and of majesty, but He is not—and this our nature enthusiasts have not considered—an ethical or a righteous God. He is certainly not a God of love. They forget that if it is the God of nature who creates the beautiful sunset, it is the same God who creates the flood, the sirocco, and the earthquake. Nature is utterly indifferent to the aspirations and hopes and ethical judgments of men. The most that can be said of nature is that it provides a background or a stage on which men, with some effort, can precariously act. But a prop is always likely to fall, and it is just as likely to hit the good man as the bad. Jesus, in a reverse fashion, recognized the blind indifference of nature when he said that God “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45).⁸ Some modern wit has turned this saying into a little jingle, which is not inaccurate.

The rain it raineth everywhere
Upon the Just and Unjust Fella,
But more upon the Just, they say,
For the Unjust has the Just's umbrella.

To find God only, or even primarily, in nature is to find a God of power and awe-inspiring majesty, but One Who reveals no concern for the things you and I care for most. It

⁸ Jesus said this to show the impartiality of God in providing the means of life for all.

is essentially a pagan and not a Christian conception of God. Fortunately God in His infinite wisdom and mercy has not left us with only this revelation of Himself.

There is a second way we learn about God. It is the same as the second way we learn about anything, from persons and especially from a Person.

The Christian Faith has always claimed that we have a special and unique revelation of what God is like in the Person of Jesus Christ. In fact Christianity declares Jesus Christ is the Incarnation of God. This does not mean that we do not learn something of God from other persons. We see something of God in the saints and prophets of all ages, and we are eternally grateful for them. In Jesus Christ, however, there is an *unique* revelation that goes infinitely beyond all others. In this connection it is interesting how unconsciously we judge "the revelations" we get from other men in terms of the revelation of Jesus Christ. We revere a Jeremiah because he anticipated Our Lord. We revere a St. Francis or a Wilfred Grenfell or an Albert Schweitzer because they seem to embody something of the spirit of Christ. We respect a Buddha or a Gandhi because his teachings to some degree approximate those of Jesus. Jesus Christ has become the norm for all our judgments. Men like Hosea may have believed that God is a God of love and forgiveness, but Jesus Christ, in His life, death, and resurrection, *demonstrated* that God loves and forgives. Fuller discussion of this revelation of Jesus Christ must be reserved for the next chapter, but Christian Faith has always claimed that Jesus Christ is *the* unique revelation of God. In order to express this conviction in language, we have always said that He is the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity. Without this revelation there never would have been Christianity, and without it there never can be.

But Jesus Christ lived and died and rose again a long time ago. We are infinitely the richer because God made this revelation of Himself in history for our benefit, but we live in a hard, mundane world, where it is difficult and sometimes impossible to follow Christ completely. We are called upon to make decisions for which there is no rule of thumb. Often in these decisions the best minds give conflicting advice, and yet we must make choices on which not only our own welfare but the welfare of those we love, or for whom we are responsible, is dependent. The Christian Faith declares that in these situations God has not left us helpless. To the earnest seeker, through prayer, He still reveals Himself and His will for us by the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost.

Even in the New Testament there is some ambiguity as to just exactly what the relationship is between the Holy Spirit and God and Christ. In the fourteenth chapter of John's gospel, which speaks most precisely about the Holy Spirit, there are at least three possible interpretations of just Who the Holy Spirit is. First, it is definitely another "Person." "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever" (verse 16). A moment later, it seems not to be "another" but Jesus himself: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (verse 18) and "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them . . . I will love him and manifest myself to him" (verse 21). Still further on it is again not our Lord but another: "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (verse 26). This ambiguity comes naturally from our human inability to understand the ways of God. Sometimes Christians speak of the leading or guidance of God, sometimes of the Spirit or Indwelling Presence of Christ

and sometimes of the work of the Holy Spirit. All of these expressions are attempts to put into language what is a fact of Christian experience, namely that there is a third way we learn of God in the midst of our daily lives. Technically we call this the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit (or Ghost).

Now there is only one God, but Christian Faith says that there are three ways in which we come to know Him, or three ways in which He reveals Himself; and for a perfect understanding of Him (as perfect, that is, as is necessary for obedience and salvation) all these ways are necessary. To remove any one of the three would be to lessen our understanding of God and make it less than Christian.

Obviously God the Father Almighty (the Creator) and the "First Person" is necessary, or there simply could not be any religion at all. And most people have been willing to accept, in one way or another, what we call God, the Holy Spirit, or the "Third Person." At least all religious souls have insisted that in prayer we have a continuing revelation of God and that without this continuing "work of the Holy Spirit" we should be at a loss to know the will of God.

Among modern liberals there is more difficulty in accepting Jesus Christ as a necessary "Second Person" of the Trinity. I shall speak of this difficulty in more detail in the next chapter. For the moment, classical Christian Faith has insisted that Jesus Christ is absolutely essential for at least three reasons. The first is that in Jesus Christ and in Him alone we see the proof of victory over evil and over death. The second is that without Jesus Christ, the hope and faith of a Hosea that God is the God of love and mercy remains only a hope, but that in Jesus Christ we see it a demonstrable fact. The third reason is that the revelation of Jesus Christ is our criterion of the work of the Holy Spirit. All of us who

have prayed at all seriously know how terribly easy it is to confuse our own personal and selfish desires with the will of God. It is the criterion of Jesus Christ which tells us whether the inspiration and leading that we get in prayer is really the work of the Holy Spirit or merely the product of our own wishful thinking. Thus, for the Christian, Jesus Christ is not only a legitimate revelation of God; He is, if it is possible to say that one revelation of the Trinity is more important than another, the most important revelation. Certainly it is Jesus Christ, the Son and Incarnation of God, and the Second Person of the Trinity, who makes Christianity what it is and distinguishes it from other religions. Without Him there would be no Christianity.

•

CHAPTER V

JESUS, CHRIST, AND JESUS CHRIST

Any attempt to present the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ is fraught with difficulties, which are increased in trying to present Him in as brief a chapter as this must be. For nineteen hundred years men have been presenting pictures and interpretations of Him, but none of them satisfies everyone. This very impossibility of capturing Him is a tribute to His greatness, His divinity. He is too great for our small minds. We constantly try to pour Him into molds of our making; every political system from autocracy to communism has appealed to His authority at one time or another. No one seems to catch His total significance. He is the eternally new wine that always bursts our old bottles. Needless to say, I am as subject to this human limitation as anyone else.

Although we have unfortunately become careless in general usage and we employ the terms "Jesus" and "Christ" and "Jesus Christ" rather indiscriminately, technically and properly, Christians should always speak of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the historical man who lived and taught in the early part of the first century. Christ is the *Christos*, the Messiah or Anointed One, who fulfills history and is the Revelation of God. To speak of Jesus is to speak merely of another superlatively good man. To speak of Christ is to speak of a divinity (perhaps only of a hope) that has no human reference and is nothing more than an abstraction. It is the essence

of Christianity that the Jesus of history is also the Divine Christos; and although we may make modifications for convenience or through carelessness, Christianity properly speaks of Jesus and Christ together—Jesus Christ.

For the purpose of discussion, however, it is sometimes helpful to separate the two ideas. In what follows I wish to speak first of Jesus the man and then of Jesus the Christ.

When we try to reconstruct the life and teachings of the man, Jesus of Nazareth, we are confronted at first with what may seem to the pious some very disconcerting facts. If, however, we are to understand Our Lord, we must face these facts. It is a glory of Protestantism that it is not afraid to search for the truth about the New Testament records even when that truth upsets some of our preconceived opinions. Indeed, of all places, this is where we must be honest and realistic, where we must avoid wishful thinking.

The simple fact is that, as a result of modern Biblical research (almost all of it carried on by Protestant scholars), we actually know far less about the life and teachings of Jesus than we wish we did. We must remember that apparently Jesus was an itinerant preacher and that He left no written record that we know of. He was obviously well read in His own scriptures, but the only record of His ever writing anything is the story in John's Gospel (7:53–8:11), the account of the woman taken in adultery, when He wrote with His finger in the dust.

The only biographies we have of Him are the four Gospels, and these are more thumbnail sketches than real biographies. Moreover, they were all written a considerable time after His death. We know that Jesus died under the proconsulship of Pontius Pilate (somewhere between 26 and 36 A.D.). The earliest and briefest Gospel, Mark, could not have been written before 63 A.D. and may not have been written

until about 70 A.D. Matthew and Luke were probably written between 80 and 90 A.D. and John not until 95 A.D. or later. This chronology puts the earliest Gospel about a generation after Jesus' death and the other three considerably later. It is very difficult to remember details of an incident a generation ago and even more difficult to remember a sermon. Furthermore scholarship is now pretty certain that Luke was a convert of St. Paul and never knew Jesus, while the writer Matthew probably is not the apostle of that name. Mark, as a boy, may have seen Jesus and seems to have obtained much of his material from Peter; but who the author of John's Gospel was is one of the most debated questions of New Testament scholarship. (Except for the Crucifixion story, perhaps, John's is a spiritual rather than a historical interpretation). It is true that behind the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) scholars find evidence of earlier writings now lost which are referred to as "Q" or the "Sayings of Jesus." It is also true that the kind of teachings of Jesus which have come down to us, chiefly parables and short, pithy aphorisms, are the kind of teachings that stick best in people's memory. Nevertheless, the sum and substance of any honest appraisal is that we are far less sure of any particular story than we should like to be.

One simple illustration should make this uncertainty clear. Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3) makes Jesus say: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Luke in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20), which obviously refers to the same teaching, makes Jesus say: "Blessed be ye poor." No amount of rationalizing can make "poor in spirit" mean the same thing as "poor." Which did Jesus really mean? There is no way to be sure.

All of this means that when it comes to saying dogmatically that Jesus said this or that, we are in a dilemma. What

we really have in the New Testament is a group of pictures by different people, each portraying the impression Our Lord made on the particular writer. Thus, the writer of Matthew, obviously steeped in Judaism, sees Jesus as the prophesied Messiah, while John, equally steeped in Greek philosophy sees Him as the eternal Logos or Word of Greek philosophy made flesh. Luke, as a physician, is interested in the man who went about doing good, and Mark seems to see primarily a man who performs "mighty works." Indeed, the impossibility of capturing Our Lord in a particular mold seems to have existed from the beginning.

What we really have, then, is not so much a clear-cut picture of Jesus as a series of impressions that He made on other people. And from this point of view, some of the writing of the rest of the New Testament is as valuable as the Gospels. The Book of Acts gives the only, even if a meagre, story of the mind of the early Church about Him before there really was a Church or were any Gospels. St. Paul's letters all were written before the earliest Gospel; and my own opinion is that, especially for the all-important matter of the Resurrection, they are as valuable as the Gospels. 720.

This conclusion does not mean that Jesus did not live nor that we have no idea of His work. We have the record of the very profound impressions He made on a number of people; and while there are differences in details, there is a large area of agreement. The whole New Testament is unanimous in its assertion that this man lived, was crucified, died and rose again—that He was the Christ (but of this more in a moment). The Synoptic Gospels are united in the same general picture of His earthly career.

Jesus was born of rather humble parents, the eldest of a large family. When He reached maturity, He was baptized by John the Baptist, and at that time seems to have had a

profound experience which He felt to be the call of God. After a period of retirement to determine the meaning of His call (the Temptations) He began as an itinerant preacher in Galilee, calling men to prepare for the Kingdom of God, which He declared was "at hand." Because of the power of His message and personality as well as a remarkable healing capacity, He at first had considerable success. His success aroused the opposition of the religious authorities, and He withdrew with His most intimate disciples for a period of exile. This ended when, near Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had another profound religious experience, partly shared by Peter, and James, and John. After this He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem although He was aware that He would probably die there. Although He was willing to die if necessary, He seems to have tried to avoid death. At least each evening He retired to Bethany, which was a safer place for Him to spend the night than Jerusalem. The stories of His disciples' finding the donkey and the man with the pitcher of water and the Upper Room seem to indicate that Jesus had an "underground" working in Jerusalem. All His movements in the city were cautious. He seems to have appeared in Jerusalem only when there were crowds around Him. He was captured in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He paused for prayer on His way back to Bethany after "The Last Supper." After a mockery of a trial, He was crucified and buried. "Three days" later He reappeared to His disciples and convinced them that He was alive and with them. The Synoptic Gospels are in complete agreement on this outline, and the whole New Testament is unanimous on the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

Just when Jesus became the Christ is more difficult to say. There seems to have been a difference of opinion from the earliest times. The earliest record in the Synoptic Gospels

of Jesus Himself claiming to be the Messiah or Christ appears at the end of the exile, when He asks the disciples who He is and accepts Peter's answer: "Thou art the Christ" (Matthew 16:16, Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20). At the time of the New Testament itself, however, there seem to have been different opinions. St. Paul, writing considerably before the Gospels, implies in his earlier letters (see especially I Corinthians 15) that it is the Resurrection that made Jesus the Christ.⁷ Certainly the Resurrected Christ is the main string in Paul's bow and the principal element of the Gospel he took to the Roman world. In his later letters, however, especially Philippians, written just before his presumed death, Paul seems to feel that Jesus is the "Pre-existent Christ" (Phil. 2:5-8). Mark, the earliest Gospel, implies that it was at the baptism by John the Baptist that Jesus became the Christ. Matthew and Luke, by their use of the "birth stories," indicate that He was born as the Christ, although their treatment of Him during His adult ministry somewhat negates this interpretation. John's Gospel, written last of all and designed for a Greek audience, has a spiritual rather than a historical emphasis, and says nothing about Our Lord's birth. But it claims that He was the pre-existent Logos or Word made flesh. Throughout John's Gospel—from beginning to end—Jesus moves more as a superhuman figure than as a man.

In view of these differences of opinion which have existed from the very beginning, it is difficult for us to be dogmatic today as to when Jesus became the Christ. Equally good Christians of sound faith and scholarship will probably continue to disagree on the moment, but that is not important. What is important for the Christian Faith is that Jesus the historical man fulfilled the intention of God to reveal Himself, and was or became the Christ, the divine Revelation of

God, the Incarnation of God and the Second Person of the Trinity.¹ This is the unanimous testimony of all the New Testament. To deny this is to deny the considered testimony of all those most intimately connected with the evidence, a denial that would be considered absurd in any other area than religion. It is also to deny the one fact which makes Christianity what it is and makes the Christian Church possible.

Whatever we may say of the moment when, it was the fact of the Resurrection more than any other event that convinced the disciples that Jesus was (or had been) the Christ. But taking the Resurrection at its full value has been a knotty problem for many moderns. Special treatment is needed both to explain it and to make clear its tremendous importance for the Christian Faith.

¹ Being reasoning creatures we try to make reasonable explanations. In the last analysis, however, just how God could reveal Himself in a man defies rational explanation. That Jesus was the Christ is an article of faith, and what was said in Chapter III on Faith applies here.

CHAPTER VI

THE RESURRECTION

Partly because of the work of Biblical "higher criticism" which has thrown the shadow of doubt on all of the Resurrection stories, and partly because of the inroads of naturalistic and rationalistic science and materialism, many modern Christians, including many of the clergy, find the Resurrection of Our Lord a stumbling block of no mean proportions.

The problem we discussed in the last chapter, the difficulty of speaking with absolute certainty concerning any particular event or teaching of Jesus, is equally if not more true of the Resurrection stories. As we have seen, all of the accounts were written up many years after the event. There seems to be at least some evidence for a belief that some or all of these stories were "written in" to support a theology about Christ that had been developed later. If this was done, it probably was done without any intention to deceive. In those days, belief in the miraculous was normal, and the idea of investigating all data with scientific care before asserting its truth was unknown. Thus in honesty we must admit that the literal and historical veracity of all the Resurrection stories, with the possible exception of the story of the empty tomb, are at least open to some question. The story of the empty tomb appears in all the Gospels, although by itself it does not necessarily prove the Resurrection.

The difficulties of accepting the Resurrection stories which modern Biblical scholarship has raised, have been

aggravated by the development of the modern scientific temper. Many people simply cannot accept, as scientifically possible or rationally justifiable, that a man rose from the dead. Under the double attack of "higher criticism" and scientific rationalism many modern Christians find the whole conception of the Resurrection embarrassing. They try to avoid it, but cannot, because the high point of the Church year is Easter. So they pathetically try to revamp the Resurrection into an ongoing spirit of love, or of hope, or of goodwill, or something that is not "to the Greeks foolishness." And in so doing they take the heart out of the Christian Faith. For the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ is central and a *sine qua non*.

Any attempt to justify the Resurrection must try to make it intelligible to modern minds. Although I accept the findings of modern Biblical scholarship and the findings of modern science, I find no difficulty in accepting the Resurrection.

Any careful reading of the New Testament record in the light of modern scholarship makes it clear that the "body" in which Christ rose was not the same kind of a "body" you and I have. As far as the record goes, it had the capacity to appear and disappear at will, as our bodies cannot. Paul makes it clear that "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 15:44, 50). This seems to mean that the individual Resurrection stories in the Gospels may be figurative writing and that they should be taken seriously but not literally.

Paul's own experience on the road to Damascus may be of help here. As far as I know, no one doubts the validity of this experience; and it is reported with minor differences of detail four different times in the New Testament. Unless one

refuses to believe any event that happened in the ancient world, one must believe that Paul had an actual experience of Our Lord on the road to Damascus. It is equally obvious that Paul's experience was accepted as *bona fide* by the rest of the apostles. In order to be an apostle one had to be a witness to the Resurrection (Acts 1:22); although the Twelve may have found Paul a turbulent person, they never doubted his real apostleship.

This seems to mean that Paul's experience may well have been the prototype of all the Resurrection experiences, and that all of them were more or less of the same as his. It is not unlikely that the other Resurrection experiences were similar to Paul's but were written up in more pictorial language. We must remember that these early Christians had had a tremendous experience which they were trying to tell others. Like all of us, they were caught by the limitations of language and described their experiences anthropomorphically. This interpretation is supported by Paul's letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 15:1-11), where Paul lists people he knows personally to whom Christ has appeared.¹ At the end of the list Paul includes himself: "and last of all, as to a child untimely born, he appeared to me also"; but Paul in no way indicates that his kind of experience was one bit different from the others.

We should not then be troubled over the use of the term "body" nor take it too literally. Such language was merely the mode of writing of the time. What we are confronted with is a group of people who had had a profound experience, so profound that it changed their entire lives and enabled them to face joyously imprisonment, suffering, and death. It is not surprising that when they tried to put it into

¹ It is worth noting that this is authentic, first-hand testimony, the validity of which no one questions.

language the result should be the most graphic language possible. Certainly the fact of the Resurrection is the unanimous testimony of the New Testament. Indeed, it is the major and almost exclusive purpose of the New Testament. That it was Paul's major concern we have already seen. The Gospels, too, very obviously make it the climax of their accounts; and any attempt to throw the Resurrection out of the Gospels is to distort them from the intention of their authors. Again in Acts, the message of Peter and of the earliest Church is the bold assertion that "this man whom ye crucified, God raised from the dead."

It is true that the individual Resurrection stories in the Gospels are subject to doubt in their literal interpretation. It is true that Luke, who wrote Acts, may well have made up the speeches and put them in the mouths of his speakers. But these authors were using those devices to make clear in language what was the most real fact of their experience. The historicity of the Resurrection cannot be doubted on the basis of the internal evidence of the New Testament. If it is to be doubted at all, it must be doubted on the basis of some extra-Biblical evidence.

This kind of doubt, it seems to me, is what troubles those who reject the fact of the Resurrection. For reasons taken almost entirely from their own, contemporary thinking they abandon the Resurrection as an impossibility and use what they consider the results of higher Biblical criticism to justify their conclusions really arrived at on other grounds. This is a very dangerous thing to do, for it leaves us without any basis or authority for judgment except our own very relative opinions. On this principle, every man's opinion becomes equally authoritative, and we end in an anarchy of relative opinions with no way of preserving "the faith once and for all delivered." Indeed, the present confusion in Prot-

estant liberal circles indicates that we have slipped dangerously far into this anarchy. It seems both foolish and arrogant for me to pit my inadequate judgment of an event nineteen hundred years ago against the judgment of the people who were on the scene at the time. I am also unready to pit my relative personal judgment against a judgment which until very recently the whole Church has affirmed and which the largest section of it still affirms. On the witness of the New Testament and on the witness of all the Church through most of its history and most of the Church through all its history, the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ is an empirical fact for the acceptance of which I see no alternative.

In addition to all this Biblical consideration, the idea of the Resurrection alone gives human life meaning at two points, at least, which it could not otherwise have. It is because of the Resurrection that we have faith in eternal life, and we have faith in the ultimate victory of the Good over the Evil. These two questions are parts of the same question, which is known philosophically as the Problem of Evil or Suffering. Of all the systems of thought the world has produced, Christianity alone has the solution to this problem.

There is not time here to argue extensively that human life is, on the whole, a tragic and frustrating affair; but I believe that almost every intelligent person who has lived at all is aware of this hard truth, however much, in our superficial and "optimistic" society, we try to cover up the fact. Honestly appraised, life is much more nearly a "vale of tears" than it is a "happy valley"; and those who have achieved the "happy valley" have done it by going through and overcoming tragedy and frustration rather than by denying and trying to escape from them. There are few of us who have

not felt at one time or another "I was meant for something better than this," "My true worth is not appreciated," "Life has been unfair to me." There are few of us who have not had to make the most we could out of second- and third-best choices. Even those few who achieve their first choice do not find it as satisfying in realization as it was in anticipation.

As we have seen (Chapter IV), the natural world seems indifferent to man's ethical aspirations. Floods and earthquakes destroy the good as well as the bad. In the present war, no one expects that only the "bad atheists" will get killed and that all the "good praying Christians" will come back alive. It is true that a thoroughly dissipated life brings its own tragic penalty, but good men are also struck down by disease and sudden death, by such frustrations of their legitimate plans as can result, for example, from unemployment. Life is hard and it is tough, and its justice, if it has any justice at all, is rough.

Except for modern evolutionary optimism, all the major philosophies have recognized the tragic nature of life. (For instance, Aristotle said that the most fortunate thing that could happen to a man was not to be born at all.) They all seek some escape device. Christianity alone faces and accepts the full weight of tragedy and offers a solution. This solution can be understood only in terms of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Too often we have tended to interpret the Crucifixion as nothing more than the heroic example of a noble ethical teacher who had the courage of his convictions. All this may be involved in the Crucifixion, but it is not enough. It is not enough because it reduces the death of Jesus to nothing more than another noble example of self-sacrifice such as has been duplicated over and over again throughout the world since time immemorial. Indeed, today, on the fields of battle, mul-

titudes of men are dying nobly, heroically, and sacrificially for their convictions. The Crucifixion of Our Lord is more than another such death. It is the symbol of what human life is like. Jesus, whatever else we may think of Him, represents the Good Man who in any decent system of justice ought to have lived. If ever there was a man who deserved to live, it was He. But He did not live. He was killed. Jesus, the Good Man, was done to death by the combined forces of evil that exist in all societies at all times. Thus He becomes the epitome of what human life is like. On the Cross He became the blood brother of all of us who despite earnest endeavors have ever been frustrated or defeated. His cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" is the cry of all mankind. All of us who have lived at all have uttered that cry in our own words some time or other. It has risen in various languages in a particularly swelling chorus above the din of battle and bombed cities. It rises also from lonely homes where there is a chair that will always be empty. But it will not cease rising now the war is over; that cry will continue as long as men are men. It will continue to be heard not only because the "normal" frustrations of life will continue in any human society, but also because men are mortal. We die, and death is the complete and inevitable frustration of all our earthly hopes and ambitions which none of us can escape.

Thus the Crucifixion of Our Lord is more than the noble death of a noble man; it becomes the symbol of human existence. Of all the systems of thought in the world, Christianity alone has dared to face and declare the tragic nature of life for its full terrible worth. It has placed a criminal cross as the central symbol of its faith. It has dared to glory in this paradox because, and only because, of the Resurrection. Christianity holds that tragedy is real and that the Cross *is*

the symbol of human life, but it goes on to proclaim that the tragedy is overcome in the Resurrection.² God raised Our Lord from the dead. This was not an act that the man Jesus performed for Himself. It is not an act that any human being can perform. It is an act of God, whereby God reveals His power and His love, and whereby He guarantees the ultimate victory of the Good over all the machinations of Evil, including the victory of life over death. This is the Christian solution to the problem of evil in human existence and it is the only solution there is. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain . . . (and) we are of all men most miserable" (I Cor. 15:14, 19).

² As Clifford Stanley has pointed out, it is for this reason that the empty Cross rather than the Crucifix (the Cross with Christ hanging on it), which the Roman Catholics use so extensively, is the true symbol of Christianity. The Crucifix with the Christ still on it symbolizes the tragedy of life and the suffering of God, but it does not symbolize the overcoming of the tragedy and the victory of God. Only an empty Cross can symbolize both the tragedy and the fact that the Resurrection has taken place.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHURCH

In the discussion of the nature of man (Chapter II), I stated that according to Protestant Christianity man is saved or justified, or "made O.K." before God, by his own personal act of faith, and that no priest, no institution, no third person can do this for him. On the surface this appears to give the Church a very secondary position. Unfortunately a great many Protestants have so interpreted the doctrine of Justification by Faith; and we hear too often, even among the clergy, that it is possible to be a good Christian and not be in any church. This easy approval of the virtuous but unchurched is really heresy. It is true that the "end" or "goal" is the individual's making a personal decision for and before God; no institution can do this for him. The Church, however, is the only means whereby the individual can learn that the decision is necessary and possible, what the terms and implications of the decision are, and how to grow in grace once the decision has been made. In other words, the Church alone is the custodian of and the historical vehicle whereby the Christian Faith and the Christian Witness is preserved and passed on from one generation to another. Without the Church there could be no Christianity; and one who pretends to be a Christian and is not actively in the Church is, as far as his Christianity is concerned, a parasite.

But what is the Church? In the answer to this question lies one of the major points of difference between Roman Catholics and Protestants. According to the Romans, the Church

is completely limited to a hierarchy of priests (and those who are obedient to them) who, because of an "Apostolic Succession," have miraculous powers to give or withhold the grace of God. No one outside this particular priesthood has this miraculous power and no one can receive the grace of God in Christ except through this priesthood. Against this, Protestants believe that the grace and the power of God cannot be so limited and that to put such limitations upon Him is blasphemy; rather, Protestants believe that any group of persons who confess Our Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament is rightfully a true Christian Church. In other words, Protestantism believes that the Church is a fellowship of believers united by their common loyalty and faith in Jesus Christ as the revelation of God for man and his salvation. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," said Our Lord (Matt. 18:20); and He said nothing about the necessity for the clergy. And this was the general nature of the earliest New Testament Church. We Protestants regret the necessity of the Reformation and hope for the time when Rome will repent of its errors and permit the Church to be again united, but the Reformation *was* necessary and it was a successful returning, as far as is humanly possible, to the true nature of the Christian Church.

It may be well to examine very briefly the historic basis for the claims of the Roman and Protestant Churches as found in the New Testament. The Romans claim their authority directly from Christ's instructions given to St. Peter. This is the incident when Our Lord asks the disciples who He is, and finally Peter says: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus commends Peter for this and then goes on to say, in Matthew 16:18-19: "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build

my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The Romans hold that here Christ gave the exclusive authority to Peter and that Peter later established the Church at Rome and became the first Bishop of Rome. The theory goes on to say that Peter passed on his authority through the "Apostolic Succession" by the laying on of hands. Both of these claims are very suspect.

To take the second first: the origin of the Roman Church is shrouded in mystery. About the end of the third century of our era, there arose a tradition that Peter had been the first Bishop of Rome for twenty-five years (42-67 A.D.). The earlier and more contemporary records know nothing of Peter's long stay in Rome nor of his bishopric. Indeed, there was no bishop as early as that. It is known that there were Christians in Rome as early as 50 A.D., for Suetonius, writing in that year, speaks of riots in the Jewish quarter "at the instigation of one Chrestus." However, Peter, according to the book of Acts, was at a Church Council in Jerusalem at that time. Neither is Peter mentioned in Paul's letter to the Romans (about 57 A.D.) nor among those who met Paul at Rome when he arrived in 61 A.D. This silence seems exceedingly strange if Peter was the leader of the Roman Christians. The fact is that after the early chapters of Acts and once Paul had arrived on the scene, Peter largely dropped out of the picture. When he did appear he seemed to be an advocate of the narrower Jewish Christianity rather than of spreading the Gospel to the Gentiles.¹ This does not

¹ In spite of the story of his converting the Roman Cornelius (Acts 10-11:18). See Galatians 2.

mean that Peter may not have gone to Rome (as capital of the Empire it was a natural center of gravity) and that he may not have died a martyr's death as many others did, but it makes a very doubtful and flimsy basis for an exclusive and authoritarian Church theory.

The historical veracity of Our Lord's charge to Peter as reported in Matthew 16:18-19 is, if anything, more doubtful. The incident of Peter's Confession, as it is called, is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-22); but neither Mark nor Luke give the slightest indication that Jesus said anything to Peter about a church. In fact in Mark's account Peter is roundly scolded by Jesus for protesting Jesus' prophecies of his death and resurrection. Nowhere in the whole Gospel record does Jesus make any reference to founding a church except in these two verses of Matthew. It seems exceedingly strange that if Our Lord had really intended to found a church along specific lines and that if He had given the complete responsibility for this to Peter, there should not be at least some other reference to His instruction elsewhere in the New Testament.

This inconsistency in the Gospel record has been troublesome for a long time. Today, however, most of the best Biblical scholars believe that Jesus did not speak these words to Peter but that these two verses (Matthew 16:18-19) were put in at a later date, either to strengthen the Church, or to give authority to the claims of the Roman Church when it was becoming established. We must remember that Matthew was not written until some time between 80 and 90 A.D.²—at least fifty years after the event recorded. It must

² This is considerably later than Mark's Gospel, which generally is believed to have been written between 63 and 70 A.D. Incidentally, Mark is often called the Petrine Gospel because it is believed that Mark obtained

also be remembered that we possess none of the original manuscripts of the Gospels and that all of the earliest ones which we do possess have numerous editorial revisions by later writers. The most reasonable explanation of these two verses is that either the writer of Matthew or some later editor interpolated these two verses to justify a theory of the Church then held.³

All of this indicates that it is highly doubtful that Jesus gave specific instructions to Peter to found a church. Indeed, a careful reading of the Gospels makes it difficult to find any instructions whatever by Our Lord regarding a new church. He seems to have been much more interested in reforming Judaism. If this be true, what is the origin and authority of the Christian Church? The Church has always rightfully claimed that it is "the Body of Christ" and that He is the "Chief Cornerstone." What is its right to this claim?

Although Jesus does not appear to have thought in terms of a new church, it does seem clear that He tried to establish a fellowship of those who believed in Him. As He became

much of his information from Peter; yet Mark has no suggestion of Jesus' giving Peter the authority to found the Church. It is also significant that by Papal Authority Matthew's Gospel has been declared the first and earliest Gospel, and no Roman Catholic scholar can even raise a question as to the historical truth of this claim.

³ This explanation is the most reasonable but of course it is not absolutely certain. There is still the possibility, although a remote one, that the Gospel of Matthew does preserve an account not contained in the other traditions. There are, however those who argue, and they can argue effectively, that this is beside the point. They say, with some justification, that Our Lord gave the Gospel, and that the Gospel created the Church, and that the Church created the Canon of the New Testament. Therefore, while these verses may not be literally true they are essentially true. This interpretation strengthens neither the Petrine nor the Roman position. The rock on which the Church is founded and against which "the gates of hell shall not prevail" is not the human and therefore necessarily weak Peter; the rock on which the Church is founded is the confession Peter made, "Thou art the Christ."

more aware that He should probably be killed, He tried to train His disciples so that they could carry on after His death. The institution of the Last Supper can best be understood as a brilliant device on the part of Jesus to weld the group into such a fellowship. It is obvious that, at the time, the disciples did not fully understand what Jesus was doing. They were still bickering among themselves about an earthly kingdom. At the Crucifixion they fled. Light came to them only after His death and resurrection. Even then there was no conscious attempt to establish a church. The disciples continued to meet in synagogues and homes, and it was not until the martyrdom of Stephen that some began to give up hope of reforming Judaism. The persecutions by the Jewish authorities which reached their climax in Stephen's death drove the Christians (although they were not called so then) into other districts, and then the Faith began to spread. St. Paul of course became the really first great missionary to the Gentiles. It is significant that he had a long, hard battle with James and Peter over the question of taking in Gentiles without making them Jews first.

In all this period, there was truly no Church in the sense of an institution. One reason for this was that the earliest Christians expected the almost immediate end of the world and the return of Christ.⁴ There was no need to establish any institution; it would all be over too soon. There was very little ritual, and the requirements were simple. To become a member of the fellowship, one had to confess Our Lord Jesus Christ and believe in Him; to be baptized, which was usually accompanied by the "laying on of hands"; to participate in the common worship of the group and to celebrate the Last Supper. Nothing else was required. But the Faith spread and the end of the world did not come. In time, as the original

⁴ The technical term for the Second Coming of Christ is the Parusia.

leaders began to die and the groups enlarged, it became necessary to develop some kind of organization to preserve the purity of the Faith and to present a united front to the growing opposition of the Roman Empire. The organization which developed, however, was absolutely necessary, for no vital fellowship can be preserved from generation to generation without an institution whose chief business is to preserve it.

Thus, as far as the New Testament record shows, Jesus did not deliberately found a church and give instructions as to how it should be run. The Christian Church merely grew out of the fellowship of believers in Him. To say this and no more, however, is to give a distorted picture of the Church. The Church is a fellowship but it cannot be compared with other fellowships, such as a fraternity or an ethical culture society. It is true that in its external historical and sociological aspect the Church grew like Topsy; but without Our Lord Jesus Christ there would have been no Christian fellowship and no Church. The Church, therefore, is the creation of Jesus Christ and He is "the Chief Cornerstone." And Jesus Christ was the Incarnation of God, fulfilling God's intention for man's salvation. The Church, then, as the creation of Jesus Christ is something other than just another sociological institution. It is the God-given means for continuing the work of salvation which He began in Jesus Christ. This is what we mean when we say that the Church is "the Body of Christ." Just as God revealed Himself uniquely in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, so He continues to reveal Himself uniquely in the continuing Body of Christ, the Church. This Church is the only Body Christ has as far as this world is concerned, and we in the fellowship are the eyes, the hands, the feet, in short, the members of

this Body which is God's agency on earth and an earnest of the Kingdom of God.

This Body of Christ, the true Church, is not essentially a hierarchy but essentially a fellowship of believers. This is what Protestantism asserts in its doctrine of the Priesthood of All True Believers. According to Protestantism and according to the New Testament, the Church is a fellowship of persons who are united by their common loyalty to God and to each other in Jesus Christ. One becomes a member of this fellowship by baptism and by public confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the revelation of God for man's salvation. One proves that one is a member of this fellowship by participating regularly in common worship, by taking the Communion or Last Supper, and, of course, by trying to practice in daily life the teachings of Our Lord as the Holy Spirit gives one light. Every member of the fellowship is as much a priest as any other member. The Protestant minister is not a special order of being, who, because he has gone through a particular ritual, has special divine powers and authority. The Protestant minister is merely a member of the laity who, because a particular fellowship (local church) requires the fulltime care of one man, has been asked to minister to that fellowship. The fact that this most important of all work requires special training and education today does not negate this principle. Spiritually the minister has no authority other than the spiritual quality of his own life. Every other member has the same authority.⁵ As St. Paul wrote, "Now there

⁵ The Rev. Jesse Trotter, writing from an Episcopalian point of view criticizes this view of the ministry. He writes: "You minimize the ministry, what you call the hierarchy. If what you say about the function and authority of the ministry is true, then a minister cannot take his people any closer to God than he himself has gone. Thank God this is not true. Over and over again people are led to the Sacraments and on to a

are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee. . . . That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another" (I Cor. 12:20, 21, 25). Admittedly—particularly in a world that seems headed for increasing centralization of authority and where people seem to want to be told what to do rather than to think for themselves—the true Church is harder to make politically effective than a hierarchical church. Christians must always be concerned about politics. But the Church—Rome to the contrary notwithstanding—is not a political institution. Perhaps in the days ahead we Protestants have no greater contribution to make to society than to maintain, with our lives if necessary, the true nature of the Church.

Human nature being what it is, it will always be true that we all have partial perspectives. Different ones of us will be attracted to different forms of worship and tend to emphasize different aspects of the total Christian Faith. Thus there will always be different forms of Church ritual and government. This is one reason for the different denominations. We shall make more progress toward ecumenicity if we recognize this fact and at the same time recognize that any group that confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and maintains Baptism, Holy Communion and Common Worship is a true part of the Body of Christ which is the Church Triumphant. And, as I pointed out at the beginning of this

holiness and consecration their minister will never know." In reply, I agree that in the Church—in the common worship, in the Sacraments, and in the spoken Word—people can be and are led "to a holiness and consecration" beyond that of the person who conducts the worship, administers the sacraments, or who speaks the Word. But this has nothing to do with the fact that the minister has gone through a special ritual of ordination. Laymen and women of the Church can, have, and do lead others on just as well. In fact, some lay persons do it better than many ordained ministers and priests.

chapter, anyone who calls himself a Christian and is not actively a member of some such Church is really living the life of a parasite.

Just a brief word on missions: Missions are the extension of the Body of Christ throughout the world. If the Christian Faith is the truth as we Christians believe it to be, then it automatically follows that we have a holy obligation to spread it to every man, woman, and child throughout the world. We have this obligation not because all the "heathen" are damned to eternal hell fires, but because we have the greatest gift for life here as well as hereafter. It is a joyous privilege and obligation to give this gift to everyone. Then too, there is Our Lord's commandment: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). Moreover in the kingdom of Christ, a soul won or lost in Timbuctoo is as important as it is in my own community. To talk of being a Christian at home but not to believe in missions is to reveal a profound lack of understanding of the true nature of the Christian Faith or the Christian Church.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KINGDOM IS COMING AND THE KINGDOM IS WITHIN YOU

The idea of the Kingdom of God is one of the most important ideas of the Christian religion. A proper understanding of its significance is essential to any proper understanding of the Christian Faith. Unfortunately in liberal Protestantism, at least, there has been a strong tendency for two or more generations to think of the Kingdom as a goal toward which we are inevitably, or almost inevitably, progressing. Some liberal preachers, mistaking change for progress, and mistaking improvement in plumbing and medicine for improvement in the souls of men, have preached a rather blind faith in the inevitable evolutionary attainment, the often quoted hope of Tennyson: "The one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves." Others, if they have preached that it was not automatically inevitable, have implied that it would be inevitable if people only worked hard enough for it. Among the pious, in some dim way, God was connected with this progress; but very frequently it appeared that God needed our help rather than our needing His, and that its attainment depended more upon what man did than on what God did.

It goes without saying that for the Christian Faith, the Kingdom of God is something to which we must give our allegiance and for which we must work with all our might, but this simple idea of its progressive realization by the acts

of man is both nonsense and contrary to the classical Christian conception of the coming of the Kingdom as found in the New Testament. We have already seen (Chapter II) that every generation starts again at scratch. A man in the course of his life may grow somewhat in Christian understanding and maturity. But he cannot pass on such as he has of these virtues to his son except as the son chooses to grow through the same painful process. At birth, the son is just where his father was at birth, an egocentric tyrant; and the son's son will be the same too. Then, as we also saw in the same chapter, no man completely rids himself of his pride and lust for power and pleasure. Into every creative act comes an element of corruption. It is nonsense and arrogance to think that we, by our efforts, are progressively creating the Kingdom of God on earth or ever shall.

The New Testament, indeed the whole Bible (for the idea of the Kingdom of God is rooted in the ancient Hebrew prophets), is much more profound at this point. The whole witness of both Old and New Testaments is that the Kingdom of God never by any possibility is the work of man; neither is it progressively achieved; it is always and absolutely the gift of God to be given by God in His good time.

This Biblical idea of the Kingdom of God coming at the end of history as the gift of God is more profound because it represents a more profound idea of justice than does the evolutionary theory. The idea of the gradual evolutionary achievement of the Kingdom really means that only those who live in the last stages of history receive the rewards of the Kingdom, whereas all the rest of mankind, all who, for untold thousands of years, shall have worked, suffered, and sacrificed for the Kingdom do not enter into it. Some men build and slave that others may enjoy the harvest. A man may, as many have, throw himself into some great battle

against social wrong and say quite honestly that all the reward he asks is the sense that he has contributed to making life a little better. It is true that great, perhaps the greatest, satisfactions of this life come from giving ourselves to something greater than ourselves. This does not negate the principle. In any genuine system of justice, all those who labor from the beginning, even in the most benighted hour, must share in the final victory and reward.

This is what Christianity claims in its doctrines of the Kingdom of God and the Resurrection. Besides the reasons already given why the Kingdom of God cannot come in history, there is the added reason that if it did come in history, then it would be unjust to all those who worked for it, but died before it came. Thus Christianity rightly claims that it is to come only at the end of history. "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32).¹ Then there will be a general Resurrection, and all who have labored will be made to share in the final reward and final victory.² When James and John, insisting that they were able to "drink the cup" Jesus had to drink, asked for seats on the right and left of the throne, Jesus replied: "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup . . . ; but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father" (Matthew 20:23).³ This means, if it means anything, that no man, then, can say who will share in the Kingdom, and that at what time he lives is therefore irrelevant. It is solely a question of whom God considers most worthy. So, too, are we to understand Jesus' words: "the first shall be last and the last shall be first" (Mat-

¹ See also Matthew 24:36.

² See p. 64, fn. 7, below.

³ See also Mark 10:39-40.

thew 20:16).⁴ The Biblical idea of the coming of the Kingdom is more just and therefore more profound than the idea of evolutionary progress.

Jesus began His preaching on the note: "The Kingdom of God is at hand." There was nothing startlingly new in this teaching. The idea of the coming of the Kingdom was as common an idea among the Jews of that time as the "New Deal" is a common idea in the United States of the 1930s and 1940s, except that the idea of the Kingdom was much more ancient and much more commonly accepted. John the Baptist had already drawn large crowds into the desert by preaching the immediacy of the Kingdom.

There is a long history of the origin and development of this idea of the Kingdom and the Messianic Hope, which we cannot go into here. In the simplest terms, it was expected to come suddenly and catastrophically, as an act of God, Who would send His Messiah (Christ) to inaugurate it. There would be chaos and war for a time, but God and His Messiah would be victorious and bring the forces of evil (usually personified by the Jews as their oppressors which, in Jesus' day, happened to be the Roman Empire) to judgment. Afterwards there would be justice, brotherhood, peace and the universal acknowledgment of the rulership of God. It was generally taken for granted that the Jewish nation would be supreme in the new Kingdom, although it would also be a universal Kingdom for all people.

To determine just exactly what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God is not as easy as some people who talk about it seem to think. His thought, as it comes to us in the records, is somewhat paradoxical, and only by centering our attention on certain of His teachings to the exclusion of others can

⁴ Also Matthew 19:30, Mark 10:31, Luke 13:30.

we make a consistent picture. Taking all of His teachings about the Kingdom together, Jesus' thought falls into three categories, two related and one unrelated. In the majority of the passages, the Kingdom is a social state, or order of society, which is coming suddenly and catastrophically; in a few passages it is a social state that is coming by a process of gradual growth. In still other passages, it is more a spiritual state of the individual than a state of society; and it is something that is here already ("The Kingdom of God is within you").

Modern liberals have tended to emphasize the passages that imply gradual growth (parables of the Sower, the Mustard Seed, and the Leaven) because they appeared to fit more closely with modern ideas of evolutionary progress. Although this element of gradual growth cannot be denied, it appears to be a very minor note when one takes all of Our Lord's teachings about the Kingdom together. Unless one rules out all the "catastrophic" passages as later additions,⁵ Jesus' total thought in this respect seems to lean heavily on the side of something not gradually achieved but coming suddenly as the gift of God. Probably the most typical parable of Jesus is the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30).⁶ Here there is growth but not growth in the sense of the gradual victory of the good over the evil.

⁵ One of the major controversies of New Testament scholarship is concerned with the question as to how much Jesus actually taught the catastrophic end of the world and coming of the Kingdom (the technical term for this is *Apocalypticism*). This is a controversy we cannot go into here. I shall only say that in my opinion it is quite possible that some of the more violent Apocalyptic teachings of Jesus may be the work of later writers, who put these words into Jesus' mouth to strengthen the weak knees of those undergoing persecution. But it is impossible to read out all of Jesus' Apocalyptic teachings. There is an immediacy about His whole message that is inescapable. "The Kingdom of God is at hand" and is to be given by God.

⁶ See also Matthew 13:47-50.

The wheat and tares grow together, and at the end there is a final harvest and judgment.

In any event Jesus certainly thought of the Kingdom as something that is coming; indeed, it was "at hand." This was so because God would give it. Jesus' major effort, at least in the Synoptic record, seems to have been to make men ready and eligible for citizenship in the Kingdom when it should come. It is in this light that the Sermon on the Mount must be understood. At the same time, Jesus also taught that the Kingdom is here now. We can enter it now, or it can enter us, if we are ready. "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). There is not an inconsistency between these statements, for this dual teaching about the Kingdom as both coming and here reveals the profundity of Jesus' thought and the glory of the Christian religion. Both ideas about the Kingdom are necessary for a complete solution of the problem of our human destiny. Let us first consider the Kingdom as coming with judgment.

I frequently use in wedding service an ancient but beautiful benediction that ends with the phrase: "Until you come to stand before Him in that day to which there is no sunset and no dawn." Once after I had used this benediction, the bride's mother twittered to me at the wedding breakfast: "It was a lovely service except for the benediction. It sounded like standing in the awful day of judgment!" The occasion was not one for a theological argument, but I felt like saying, "Madam, if you don't believe in the awful day of judgment, what *do* you believe?" Without the idea of a judgment, which is God's judgment—somewhere, sometime—life is utterly meaningless and futile. As we have already seen, man is incapable of saving himself. The tragedy of life is real. Evil—Christian Scientists to the contrary notwithstanding—is real. In this world there will always be tares, and the

tares will always choke out at least some of the wheat. Good men will always be unjustly crucified in one way or another. There is absolutely no solution to this human problem except in terms of a judgment by a God Who truly understands and Who has the power to vindicate ultimately the good and destroy the evil. This power is what is meant by the Christian Faith when it says, concerning the Kingdom of God, that it is something that is coming with judgment.⁷ It is the real basis of Christian Ethics.

At the same time, the Kingdom of God is also always "within you." It is something that we can enter into, at least in part, here and now. Jesus' main concern seems to have been to make men eligible to receive or enter this Kingdom. To discover the way to this salvation is to discover "the pearl of great price" which is more than worth "all that a man has." It is to discover, in the language of St. John, "abundant life" or "living water" and in the words of St. Paul "newness of life."

The question is: how does one enter into the Kingdom or how does one have the Kingdom enter into one? In what follows I am deeply indebted to the thought of my former teacher, Dr. Paul Tillich, although I should not want to saddle him with all my interpretation.

All of us are aware that we use the word "time" in two different ways. On the one hand, we speak of the passage of time—clock time or historical time. On the other hand, we speak of the "right time."⁸ Certain times are propitious for

⁷ In passing, it is worth noting that the Christian Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead is part of this total concept. The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead means that no matter when a man lived and died or how he was defeated in this life, he shares, if he was a loyal servant of the Lord, in the Final Judgment and Victory. The form, "Resurrection of the Body" which upsets literalists is merely the attempt to put this idea in personal terms. Each of us shares in it. (See p. 60, above.)

⁸ Dr. Tillich uses the Greek word *Kairos* to speak of this kind of time.

certain action. We sometimes say that we must wait until the time becomes "right" or "ripe" before we act. At the "right time," if it truly is the right time, there are more possibilities for success than at another time, and one of the greatest marks of genius is to know when the time is right for a certain action. There are *more* possibilities at the "right time," but in this human world there seldom or never are perfect possibilities. They are always possibilities within the framework of limitations. Frequently we cannot wait until we are sure that the right time has come, but have to make a decision or to act at a time when the limitations are greater and the possibilities less than we should like. In other words, life presents us with an infinite series of opportunities for making decisions and acting. In some of these opportunities we can wait until the time becomes ripe, in others we must do the best we can under the given circumstances. Most of these opportunities are *seemingly* trivial (for most of us live rather routine lives), such as working with an associate, greeting a customer, studying an assignment, or writing a letter, and so on. Sometimes they are obviously more important, such as deciding our life work, or whom we shall marry. In every case, however, there are various potentialities and possibilities which we can exploit well or badly. From the Christian point of view, every one of these opportunities or possibilities is God given. (We have already seen in Chapter II that there is no area or decision in life that does not have religious significance.) Therefore insofar as I fulfill all the potentialities within the limits given in the situation, I fulfill the will of God for me.

There are three things to note. One is that if I am really to fulfill all the possibilities of the situation, I must try to understand them as given by God. They are not necessarily the possibilities I see from the point of view of my own worldly

success. This, of course, means prayer and seeking the "mind of Christ." The second fact to be noted is that the understanding which I have of the possibilities must always be my own understanding as God in Christ gives me guidance. It cannot be the understanding of someone else (such as a priest or minister) except as I recognize that person's advice as right and make it my own. The fact that the understanding of the possibilities must always be *my* understanding (in Christ) explains how Christians of equal sincerity can differ on social issues, as for instance Christian pacifists and non-pacifists differ in regard to war. Since we all differ in temperament and environmental conditioning, and since none of us achieves perfection, we all see things differently. God never asks more of any individual than that he try to fulfill the most he sees in a given situation according to the Spirit of Christ. Insofar as a man is loyal to that Spirit he is justified.⁹

The third point is that success in worldly terms is meaningless and irrelevant. One can fulfill the *Kairos* and be a miserable failure in this world's terms, and one can be a worldly success and fail God miserably. To use the very simple illustration of a foot race, if the runner wins the race but does not run to the best of his ability at that time, he

⁹ Dr. Vernon Helming writes, "In particular situations I should think that the Spirit of Christ might prove a little vague. Assume a member of the C.I.O. He may remember the wartime no-strike pledge: don't strike. He may know of capitalistic profiteering in his plant, and cannot doubt the rising cost of living: therefore strike. As a Christian he wants nothing for himself. But there is his family, and Tom's and Dick's and Harry's. There are, indeed, the rights of labor. . . . The private judgment here is under too great a strain . . ." I reply: It is true that trying to do the will of God is not easy and in nothing that I have written do I mean to imply that it is easy. In the situation described it would not greatly matter whether the Christian worker struck or did not strike. I believe that after as honest appraisal as possible by him of all the factors, and after honest prayer, he would be led to one decision or the other. As long as he acted on that decision in faith to the best of his Christian ability he would be fulfilling the Spirit of Christ for him and be justified.

has failed; if he came in last but fulfilled all the possibilities in running that were open to him (including his preparation) he is a success. The supreme example of this is our Lord Jesus Christ going to the Cross. From every human standard, He was a failure; but from God's point of view, He fulfilled perfectly all the possibilities of the situation given Him.

When we fulfill all the possibilities and potentialities of a given moment or time, we enter, for that moment, the Kingdom of God. The moment passes, and we are presented with a new situation; but for the moment, insofar as we fulfilled the will of God as we saw it in Christ, we were momentarily in the Kingdom of God. (Dr. Tillich calls this kind of success the fragmentary realization of the Kingdom in this life.) And the inner feeling, "That time I did what was needed as I saw it," is a clue to the meaning of "the Kingdom of God is within you." Thus the Kingdom of God is something that both is coming and is here now. It is coming in that the permanent Kingdom of God as a social state can only come at the end of history when God in His infinite wisdom makes the final victory of the Good over the Evil. It is also "at hand" in that God is endlessly presenting us with new opportunities for doing His will in this life; and as we fulfill these opportunities, we enter now into the Kingdom.

While these opportunities occur in every area of human life, none of them is more easily realized than those offered in and through the Church and its worship. Worshiping in Church and taking Communion are not all there is to life, but the Church *is* the representative of the Kingdom of God on earth. It is the one "permanent fragment" of the Kingdom of which you and I can be part; and when we enter common worship and especially when we take the Communion, we in a special way become citizens of the Kingdom. To neglect

these opportunities is not only to deny our profession of Faith; it is also to deny ourselves the best opportunities we have of fulfilling our God-intended destinies.

The Kingdom is coming and the Kingdom is within you. Both of these ideas are necessary for our lives. In this world where we constantly face frustration and eventually death, it is essential to know that there is a Kingdom coming where the good and the beautiful are permanent, and that it is not dependent for its success on the feeble efforts of men, but that it is coming because the Alpha and Omega of the universe has ordained it. On the other hand, for those of us caught in the toils of this life, if there were only the distant—and sometimes it can seem very, very distant—Kingdom, we should feel that life is hardly worth the effort. We need a Kingdom which we can enter, or which can enter us, here and now. It is the unspeakable glory of the Christian religion that it declares that God offers both of these Kingdoms, which are really the same Kingdom, to those who will enter by Faith.

•

CHAPTER IX

THE BASIS OF SOCIAL ACTION

One of the brighter stars in the crown of Protestantism has been its emphasis upon what is now called "The Social Gospel" or "Social Action." There is not space here to trace the development of this movement from the days of its pioneers, men like Shaftesbury and Wilberforce, down to the present day. It is perhaps enough to notice the differences in social legislation and in concern for the rights of the individual common man one finds in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries where Protestantism has been strong with the situation in the Latin countries where Protestantism has been weak and persecuted. In the past fifty years or so there has been an increasing emphasis in Protestantism on the Social Gospel, and this constant emphasis upon the duty of Christians to live the law of love in social terms has done far more than many people realize to create the relatively high social conscience that exists in this country. To claim this is by no means to claim anything like perfection. We have been unable to eliminate war; we still have slums and economic insecurity; and the race discrimination in America, North as well as South, is a far cry from being Christian. Yet some things have been done, not the least of which is the feeling that the individual *ought* to have the benefit of the Four Freedoms; and what has been done has been accomplished to a large degree by the quickened Christian conscience of Protestantism.

The primary motive for this Christian social conscience has been derived from variations of the general theme: "Building the Kingdom of God on Earth." Under this high hope men and women have gone out to the foreign mission field, into the slums, into labor, and into industry and government. It is almost impossible for Protestant bodies to meet without passing resolutions condemning one social injustice or another, and advocating some scheme of social reconstruction. It is true that many of these resolutions never get beyond the minutes of the recording secretary, but the cumulative effect has had a real influence on the cultural conscience of the country.

No Christian in his right mind would want to minimize the value or importance of this social emphasis, nor would he wish to undercut it. Yet there are many people in our churches who feel that the Christian Faith, as I have presented it in the foregoing chapters of this book, leads to an other-worldliness which will "cut the nerve of social action." The basic presupposition of these critics of the return to the classical Christian theology is that the incentive to moral and social action is dependent upon the ultimate success of some ideal, such as world peace, social justice, or social brotherhood. The argument of their criticism seems somewhat as follows: "If you say that the Kingdom of God (or perfect peace, or justice) can never be realized on earth, that man will always be too sinful and selfish to create it and that it can only come at the end of history as the gift of God, then why try to do anything? We do not ask or expect the Kingdom to be built in our lifetime; it will take years, centuries; but if we are not contributing to its eventual realization, then why try to work and sacrifice for something that will never happen? Why not just sit back, practice an escapist mysticism, and let God do the rest? You are robbing us

of the motive which has done tremendous good in the world and has enlisted the support of our most idealistic people." Such in general is the argument of a large, fine, and earnest group of "social gospel-ers." The criticism is made in bewilderment and sincerity, and it must be sincerely answered.

First of all, hard though it may be to accept, if there be, as Christianity maintains, a God Who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ for our salvation, and if that revelation leads irrevocably to an other-worldly mysticism, then that is what it leads to and we must conform. It cannot be said too often that the Christian Faith is not something we make up to suit ourselves; it is something that is given by God Almighty through Jesus Christ. It is something which we either accept, regardless of what it does to our own personal desires, or which we reject. If we accept it and sincerely try to live it, we have the right to call ourselves Christians even though we fall short of the mark (as we shall); if we reject it and are honest, we should not call ourselves Christians. Furthermore, whether we like it or whether we do not, the whole testimony of classical Christianity and of the New Testament is that the Kingdom of God is not something that we shall ever build here on earth and that it is always the gift of God to be given by Him in His infinite wisdom. *But this does not cut the nerve of social action.* It is only a misunderstanding that fears that it does so. Properly understood, the Christian Faith will always lead men to give themselves for the welfare of their fellowmen. This statement needs a brief elaboration.

A very real, but ultimately a minor, point is that although we never can have a perfect society or the Kingdom of God on earth, there are very genuine differences among possible states of society here on earth. Saint Augustine rightly pointed out over 1500 years ago that the Christian is really

a citizen of two worlds at once. During his earthly life, he is a citizen of a temporal society (the City of the Earth) and at the same time of an eternal or heavenly society (the City of God). Compared to his loyalty to the City of God, his loyalty to the City of the Earth is inconsequential. As long as he remains in this life, however, he has very real responsibilities for making the City of the Earth as tolerable as possible; and much can be done.

To illustrate in modern terms: to a man in an airplane some 30,000 feet up in the sky, the difference between living on a hill or in a valley, if they are noticeable at all, are inconsequential. But to the people living on that hill and in that valley the differences may be very real. By no stretch of the imagination can we believe that the hilltop can ever be built up to the airplane (it will only reach the airplane when the pilot brings the latter to earth), but it is easy enough to recognize that there are genuine, although temporal benefits, in getting as many people as possible out of the valley onto the hill. Thus, one need not necessarily believe in the Kingdom of God as a historical possibility in order to believe that it is far better, and worth working for, to live in a state of relative justice rather than in one of injustice. This, however, is not a particularly Christian position nor a particularly Christian motivation; any ethically conscious person could accept it.

What then *is* the Christian motivation for social action? To answer this question we must go back again to the major Christian premise: the fact of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. This means that the most important task that you and I have is to make ourselves acceptable unto God. We make ourselves acceptable unto God by trying to do His will as revealed to us in Jesus Christ—by trying to apply the law

of love in every area of life. But the motive, be it noted, is not that the areas of life will gradually become better (even though, temporarily, they do): such results we must ascribe merely to good fortune. Rather the motive is to fulfill the demands of God.

This view puts the whole Christian motive for social action on a different but much firmer basis. Those who say that we must have the hope of building the Kingdom before we can go out and build it, unconsciously (but none the less really), put the motive on a pagan basis. Perhaps at no other point have the acids of modern secularism so subtly seeped into Christian thought. Actually this attitude means that we do not trust God completely and that we must have success in worldly terms; actually this attitude says: "I must have the satisfaction of success before I shall help." At its deepest level, this is an attitude of selfishness and pride; we want our share of the credit in something other men can see and praise us for, even though we pretend we do not want the praise. The real test of faith and trust in God comes not when we work hard to accomplish some good and see it gradually succeed, but when we work hard and see no earthly hope of its success, and still work. As William A. Spurrier expressed it in *Christus Victor Newsletter*:

One works for social equality, justice, order and brotherhood only because these are expressions of his love for God and his consequent love for men. Given this love, what difference does it make if someone tells us that perfect brotherhood is not possible in history? Why should that negate man's love for man and for God? If such knowledge does rob man of his love, it only proves that his love for God was not real. It proves that his love was essentially a love for himself and for the significance of his works.

The idea that we must feel that we are actually building the Kingdom, or that we must have some worldly success before we can work for it, is a less than Christian idea.

Contrary to this idea, and to its corollary, so popular to-day, that the way of love will pay dividends here and now in returned attitudes of love,¹ Jesus makes it abundantly clear that we cannot expect any social reward. In his oft quoted parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), his greatest illustration of love in action toward a member of another race, there is not the slightest suggestion that the Good Samaritan expected or received any benefit for his magnanimity. It is not even suggested that the victim of the thieves thanked him. All that he received for his efforts was risk, trouble, inconvenience, and expense. Again in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that the only reason for forgiving, going the second mile, loving our enemies and so forth is that this kind of disinterested love is required by God of His children: "But I say unto you, love your enemies . . . and pray for them that persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Why? Not because it will make our enemies nicer to us or because it will create a happier social state, but "that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:45). We are to forgive men their trespasses against us, not on any pragmatic or utilitarian grounds, but because we are all sinners; and then "your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14). Indeed, Our Lord brings the Beatitudes to a climax by saying

¹ It is true that an attitude of love may and sometimes does have a reconciling effect. More frequently love's opposites, hate and distrust, produce a response of hate and distrust. Certainly love is much more likely than hate to pay dividends in reconciliation and harmony. Love, however, by no means always pays such dividends. Jesus' love while on the cross reconciled none of his tormenters. An attitude of love on the part of a Jew standing before a Gestapo tribunal would have little effect on his judges.

that we are to count ourselves blessed when "men shall reproach you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake" (Matthew 5:11). The supreme example is again Jesus, putting His teaching to the acid test in going to the Crucifixion. As Our Lord trudged His weary way up the road to Golgotha and a criminal's death, He was, from any human standard of success, a failure. Alone and forsaken by even His most trusted disciples, everything He had tried to do seemed doomed to futility. And indeed, *humanly speaking*, it was doomed to futility. Jesus was a realist; He had known what was coming and had predicted His death. But Jesus had a sublime faith in God and a sublime conviction that although He might be defeated utterly His only responsibility was to obey God and God would take care of the rest.² And God did take care of the rest in the Resurrection, but that was not a *human* undertaking. Jesus, then, both in His teaching and in His action, put the sole emphasis for Christian social action upon obedience to God.

This is the true Christian basis for all ethical action. We work for social and economic justice, for social brotherhood and a warless world, in a word, for the Kingdom, not because we expect ever to realize these states here on earth, but because working for them to the limit of our ability and energy is the only way we can fulfill the demands of God upon us as revealed by Christ. "If a man say, I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I John 4:20). This puts the whole motive

² The people who talk about following Jesus' teachings in the realm of ethics without accepting His faith in God are talking the impossible. Jesus could only teach and live as He did because of His absolute trust that God is the kind of a God Jesus revealed. To remove the personal God from Jesus' ethics is to make them meaningless.

for social action on a far firmer basis. Now we need not worry about the results of our efforts. To be free from worry is one of the first steps toward free and creative living. Though we see worldly failure staring us in the face, we have no cause to give up or become cynical. We know that God does not ask us to be worldly successes but only to be obedient, unto death if necessary, and to trust Him for the results. What firmer basis for social action could there be than the knowledge that even though we fail, we are at the same time guarded, justified, and made victorious on a higher level by the Creator of all there is?

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



141 861

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

